

A minting error strikes the Lincoln Memorial

By Roger Boye

HERE ARE MORE questions from the reader mailbag:

Q—I recently acquired a 1976-D cent from a nearby store. As you know, the letters "FG" are supposed to appear, in very small size, on the back near the Lincoln Memorial. On my coin, the letter "F" is missing. Is the coin valuable or not? "FG" stands for the name of Frank Gasparro, designer of the tails side of the Lincoln Memorial cent.—A. B., Chicago

A—Missing small letters [like the "F" in "FG"] on the Lincoln cent and on other coins is a common minting error. It is caused in one of at least three ways.

A coin is made when a "blank" or slug is stamped with a die made of hard steel. The design has been "engraved" into the die, and when the stamping occurs, the design on the die is impressed into the blank.

The "engravings" on the die tend to become "smooth" the longer the die is used. A die can make only so many coins before it must be replaced. Thus, coins made toward the end of a die's "life" may not have every letter distinct.

Missing letters also are caused when the die

becomes filled with metal at a certain spot and does not form all the letters. Or perhaps the die didn't "strike" your coin with quite the force it should have, creating a "weak strike." Often, a small letter or two are missing on a weakly struck coin.

Incidentally, the reverse side of the Lincoln cent is one of the worst when it comes to missing letters. On some cents, for example, the "E" or other letters in "E Pluribus Unum" are missing.

A collector of error coins might pay 10 cents for your cent. In general, it is difficult to estimate the value of coins with minting errors. It's impossible to know how many other coins exist with a similar error. And relatively few people collect error coins, so it is hard to gauge demand.

You might enjoy a book on coin errors. Two popular ones are "Major Variety and Oddity Guide of U. S. Coins," by Frank G. Spadone [\$2.50] and "The Official Guide to Mint Errors," by Alan Herbert [\$2.95]. Check your nearest coin store.

"WHAT IS A good book that gives the value of United States and Canadian coins?" is an

important question often asked by readers.

It has been answered here before, but for the benefit of some readers who have written recently, I'd like to repeat the information.

Many good coin books are on sale in most coin shops and in some book stores. Perhaps the most popular book on U. S. coins is R. S. Yeoman's "A Guide Book of U. S. Coins," also known as the Red Book. The 1976 [29th] edition costs \$3.95.

The book is full of illustrations and information and lists average dealer selling [retail] prices for U. S. coins.

For a listing of dealer selling prices of Canadian coins, and information about the coins, try "Standard Catalogue of Canadian Coins, Tokens and Paper Money," by J. E. Charlton. The 1976 edition is sold in most coin stores for \$3.95.

Because these books are published annually, they do not reflect more recent price fluctuations. To keep up-to-date with price changes, some collectors subscribe to the weekly coin newspapers Coin World [Sidney, Ohio 45365] or Numismatic News Weekly [Iola, Wis. 54945], or to Coin Prices magazine, published six times yearly in Iola, Wis.